



PRESS RELEASE

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Diamondbacks Versatility Keeps Kitty Hawk In Fight

By Journalist 2nd Class Randy Lane, USS Kitty Hawk public affairs

USS KITTY HAWK, At sea -- While protecting the skies and seas around USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) and its battle group during exercise Valiant Shield 2006, the F/A-18F Super Hornets of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 102, the "Diamondbacks," have flown numerous missions aimed at refining their skills and ability to operate effectively with units of the U.S. Air Force.

With so many different ships and aircraft participating in Valiant Shield, the Super Hornet, with its versatility and adaptability, provides the perfect tool for meeting the needs of the mission.

"Whether its ability to conduct aerial refueling, protect the carrier from enemies, or survey the area using radar, a simple configuration change allows the [Super Hornet] to be ready for anything," said Lt. Patrick O'Connor, an F/A-18F pilot with VFA-102.

During Valiant Shield, the majority of the Diamondbacks' missions involved simulating attacks on ships that posed a threat to Kitty Hawk. Because of the Super Hornet's versatility, they were also used to search the area for threatening aircraft and refueling friendly aircraft on extended missions.

"Fuel consumption is a big issue for carrier based squadrons. We don't have the luxury of returning to an air base, so we have to constantly make sure we've got enough fuel to land safely on the ship," said O'Connor. "By exchanging our payloads for fuel tanks, we can help other squadrons, or our fellow Diamondbacks, stay in the air long enough to complete their missions."

One challenge posed by Valiant Shield is the increased operations tempo. With so many aircraft missions, the maintenance crews that maintain and repair VFA-102's jets have to work quickly to return the planes to the sky.

"When we're flying three to four missions a day, things tend to get worn out," said O'Connor. "Our talented maintenance crew has done a great job keeping everything operational so we can get back out and fight our simulated enemies."

Another challenge of Valiant Shield is coordinating exercises, events and missions between the different services.

“The Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard are all participating in this exercise,” added Ensign James Riley, the VFA-102 intelligence officer. “Coordinating units from different services together into one force is our greatest challenge, but also our best training objective.”

“If we were actually called to take action against a hostile enemy, we’d most likely be working in a joint environment,” said O’Connor. “Exercises like Valiant Shield help us work through any interoperability problems safely.”

The Kitty Hawk Carrier Strike Group is currently participating in Valiant Shield 2006, the largest joint exercise in recent history. Held in the Guam operating area June 19-23, the exercise includes 28 Naval vessels, including three carrier strike groups. Nearly 300 aircraft and approximately 22,000 service members from the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard are also participating in the exercise.

For more information on Valiant Shield, log on to the official Web site at www.pacom.mil/exercises/vs2006/index.shtml

The Kitty Hawk Strike Group is the largest carrier strike group in the Navy and is composed of the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63), Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 5, the guided-missile cruisers USS Chancellorsville (CG 62) and USS Cowpens (CG 63), and Destroyer Squadron 15.

To find more news about the Kitty Hawk Strike Group, visit the Navy NewsStand at www.news.navy.mil/local/cv63/.

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